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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

DPC 222

TRANSCRIPT OF DAILY BRIEFING
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 1978
(ON THE RECORD UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED)

MR. CARTER: Good afternoon.

I have no announcements. George Sherman, however, will be handling peace in our time at 1:00.

Q Hodding, on the Guyana costs situation, as of last Friday, I think we were told it was about two to three million dollars, not counting military salaries. Have you got any updated figure?

A No, I don't. I think the decision is going to be at this point, for some of the reasons that the Deputy Assistant Secretary mentioned, which was methodological, but also because it is a cumulative business. We're not going to have any preliminary figures. We will try to give you the final figure when the figure is available, that is accumulated.

Q Do you know when the survivors are coming back?

A No, I don't.

Q Do you know what's going to happen to Jones' body at Dover?

A I don't think I do. Let me say something sort of generally on the question of disposition of remains, however, which may go to that and other questions. We are not going to be giving out information, out of this building, on that question. If relatives or other members who are responsible wish to do so, they can, and obviously will; but we will not be in that position.

Q What about the unidentified or unclaimed ones that have no relatives or others?

A The question of what is going to happen with the unidentified, the disposition, is one which is being considered. Obviously we are going to try to treat them with dignity, and the question of their disposition in the Dover area will be decided in consultation, obviously, with folk in that area as well.

Now, on the unclaimed but identified?

Q Yes.

A I think, again, as I understand it, the probable result will be that they will be interred, disposed of, in the Dover area also.

Q At Government expense? Bushnell was asked about this the other day; and as I understood he said at Government expense, they would bury the unidentified in the Dover area.

A I don't see any reason to change that answer.

Q When I asked you how the survivors were coming back, you say you don't know. Do you know when they will be coming back?

A Let me try to focus this one: On the individuals who may choose to go home their own way, no, the answer is I don't know. On the question that I believe Marvin asked me yesterday -- that is, a planeload possibility coming to Charleston -- I don't have anything to add to that. That is to say, there isn't any plane today; at this point, probably not tomorrow; and to repeat, we do plan to bring survivors to Charleston in a group, if a group so wishes, assuming that such a substantial number have the permission of the Guyanese Government to leave and wish to go to the United States by that means. But as of now, there isn't a planned trip to Charleston.

Q Hodding, how many would have to express interest to fly on a U.S. Air Force plane?

A I don't know.

Q And what is going to happen to them when they get to Charleston? Will they be questioned by the FBI or --?

A I don't know. I think all of those questions also bear, for instance, on what's happening in Guyana; that is, answers to them would bear on what happened to them in Guyana, and it would also have to do with who they are. I don't know the answer, and I'm not sure it's that clear, because at least one survivor, I know, has come back and proceeded on.

Q Just one more question: Since they found about 870 passports, those people who are not taking advantage of the offer, how are they flying back to the U.S. if they are? Are they getting new passports from the Embassy or --?

A They are obviously having to be cleared out somehow. I'll have to take that question as to whether they are getting their old passports back or whether they are getting something new issued. I'll take that question.

Q Hodding, what was the reason you gave for not giving out any preliminary figures?

A Simply because it is a matter of personal privacy which we do not believe the Government ought to intrude on.

Q No. I meant on the costs.

A Oh, on the cost.

Q You gave some reason for not giving out any preliminary --

A Simply because, one is that it has not been accumulated; two, I am not sure that the situation has changed since last week when Mr. Bushnell indicated that the question of sorting out how you do the actuarial work. I'm not sure that has been decided, that is, do you charge against this mission the expense of people who were otherwise on the payroll, whether this mission went forward or not? Do you charge against various aspects of it?

Q Hodding, has there been any consideration given to charging some of these costs against the assets of the cult, and if not that, against these bags of money that keep turning up as people were apparently extorted by their leaders?

A I had a variation on that, Barry, yesterday. I thought I took it, because I didn't have the answer then. I certainly don't, unfortunately, have that answer now. The basic question you want is --

Q The basic question is: To what extent does the United States' humanitarian concerns mean that the taxpayer has to pay the cost of this enormous expense, and I suppose it is getting to be much greater than you anticipated?

A I'm sure it is. It's substantial.

Q Now, the Guyana Government has recovered all sorts of funds that have been turned over to the Government of Guyana, and I wondered if there has been any consideration of maybe diverting some of those funds to pay for some of these expenses.

A I would say generally that that would be easier said than done, since the funds are held in another country and the disposition of them and the ownership of them and all the rest has not, I think, been totally determined, first. Second, insofar as finding some way to assess costs, I do not believe that that one has been addressed directly. I think that the feeling was that the necessity, for various reasons, from identification, investigation, and others, was that we had to get the bodies out to the place.

I will take, again, that question.

Q Hodding, this may be a question that you will have to take, too, but I wonder if you could clarify for us the whole subject of the autopsy on Jones. Apparently, the Justice Department says the United States has no plans to call for an autopsy. On the other hand, officials in Delaware have indicated that before he could be cremated, they would have to have one. In view of the intense interest in this, doesn't it seem logical that they would want to know what was the cause of death, especially since he is the only one who had been shot?

A Barry, on that one, I think you'll get a faster answer from Justice than me.

Q We have an answer from Justice which says there are no plans for autopsy.

A Yes, but that, frankly speaking, is a legal question. I mean the State Department's responsibility doesn't run to that end.

Q Hodding, it's clear now that the Peoples Temple was a communist group. They were negotiating or considering moving to the USSR or Cuba, and I have two questions on this: One, did the Department have in its files any information on the political orientation of this group before this tragedy? And were any steps taken to alert Mrs. Carter, Vice-President Mondale, Members of Congress, and other high-level officials who had endorsed Jones and his group, about this orientation?

A Well, I think that while the record will necessarily show your designation, I can't make that characterization myself as to what it was.

Q You can't?

A I cannot.

Q You don't have any information yet that would identify them as such?

A No. I cannot on evidence that I have, and certainly not on some letters and what other stuff that I've seen in the press make such a designation on the characterization.

Q Excuse me. On that point --

A On the characterization.

Q Do you dispute --

A No, as a matter of fact, I don't have to dispute it, Reed.

Q On that point --

A I don't have to dispute it, Reed.

Q On that point --

A I'm just telling you I am not able to address that characterization.

Q Are you disputing --

A I'm not able to comment on that characterization.

Q Are you aware of the fact they were negotiating with the Soviet Union for a move to the Soviet Union?

A I've seen reports to that end.

Q You don't dispute that.

A I've seen reports to that end. I am not --

Q You are neither confirming nor denying it?

A I cannot. On the question of the Carter thing, that does go back to '76, and the Mrs. Carter letter, the Campaign of '76. The others, there is some dispute as to whether they exist or not, that is whether such letters or endorsements were written.

Q Do I take it your answer is that you had no information about the political orientation of this group and therefore, you made no effort to alert anybody to it?

A I expect that there were a number of allegations made, as allegations are often made, by questioners as well as by letter-writers about various aspects of that particular organization, so I can't say. I'm simply not able to comment on that question as to whether or not there was information alledging that particular aspect of their behavior, i.e. that they were somehow communist.

Q But Mr. McCoy who made numerous visits there never got any inclination or indication that they were a communist group?

A No. As a matter of fact, I don't think that was ever one of the questions that was raised to us about that group.

Q Independently, it wouldn't have occurred to him to look into that?

A No. As a matter of fact, independently, that probably would have been a question that if it were raised by a government official, ordinarily about Americans individually or abroad, where it might be considered to be one that you don't raise.

Q I see. You wouldn't raise it?

A I didn't say you wouldn't.

Q You'd avoid that issue.

A I said it might ordinarily be one that you would think twice about, particularly in the absence of any allegation.

Q I see. Now, a second question on that same point: Second question, have any of the survivors, since they had indicated an interest in going to the Soviet Union or Cuba before the tragedy, have any of the survivors requested that they go to one of those countries

or another communist country rather than return to the United States?

A I'm not aware of such a request. As a matter of fact, I think they are still trying to sort out most of them, what they are going to do and how they are going to do it.

Q Did you take the question yet about who would be paying for the survivors, if they do come back singly or as a group?

A Yes, I did. Did I get an answer?

VOICE: The survivors will refund the money to the government. They have signed papers saying that.

MR. CARTER: They have signed a paper which is a fairly standard form for indigents and others in that category who are abroad, that they are tasked with it.

Q What?

A That they are tasked with paying back the money and writing a pledge that they will.

Q Hodding, the Department has now had a day to look over this Amnesty International report on human rights in China --

A All right. I'll take it. Just a minute. Anything else on Guyana?

Q Maybe you responded to this earlier, but do you know whether the State Department in any way or any aid in any way went to this group down there, State Department aid? There was some report in The New York Times or somewhere which suggested that U.S. aid in some way had been funneled?

A To the best of my knowledge, Allen, there has been no U.S. aid funneled to that group, but Social Security checks to folks and that sort of thing.

Q But that's not what I mean, no.

A No. I even saw it suggested somewhere -- I don't know where -- that we bought the land or something.

Q I just wanted to know whether that had been checked out. Has that been looked into at all?

A Yes. I mean, we have no evidence of that.

Q Hodding, is it an ordinary situation when an American citizen dies in another country, for that country to keep the money?

A I think they would ordinarily investigate exactly to whom it belongs and make a disposition accordingly. I don't think, however, this is not --

Q The foreign government would keep the money, normally, in that type of situation?

A No. I don't think I know what "normal" is. This is a fairly abnormal situation.

Q Hodding, is there anything further on the allegation that a half a million dollars was to be delivered to the Soviet Embassy, together with a letter, and that that letter is in the possession of the Guyana Government?

A I think almost all of these things, going back to what I said yesterday, allegations of various sorts which have surfaced, letters, reports, various officials saying things, they are all in the status of a matter which is being investigated, and that I am not going to be able to comment on it until the investigation is through. And in any case, insofar as any aspects which have to do with legal questions, that is, illegal activities or the like, are going to have to be answered by the appropriate legal authorities and not State.

Q But you haven't been able to find out whether the Guyana authorities have that letter or -- ?

A No. What I'm saying is that at this point, I'm not going to be able to comment on most aspects of the investigation of this matter. I can comment a great deal about what it is that we are trying to do with the victims and that sort of thing; but in terms of what is being investigated, I'm not going to be able to comment.

Q Do you want to do the Amnesty International? I have another one.

A Sure. What do you want?